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(54) Digital image reproduction apparatus with a virtual copy sheet reservoir

(57) A digital image reproduction apparatus is provided with a platen for positioning thereon a document for copying, it being possible to position the document both in a lengthwise and in a transverse orientation, and a scanner unit for scanning a document positioned on the platen. A printing unit is also provided for printing copies of scanned documents. The latter is provided with at least one reservoir for copy sheets.

The apparatus is also provided with an operating panel having setting means for setting a required format and a required orientation of copies to be produced, said device being adapted to offer, for a copy format, a choice of all the orientations corresponding to the said positioning orientations, including at least one orientation for which no stock of copy sheets is available in the printing unit.

In the event that an operator sets the said unavailable orientation, the image data are automatically rotated to the orientation for which there is a stock of copy sheets available in the printing unit and then said image data are printed on copy sheets from that stock.

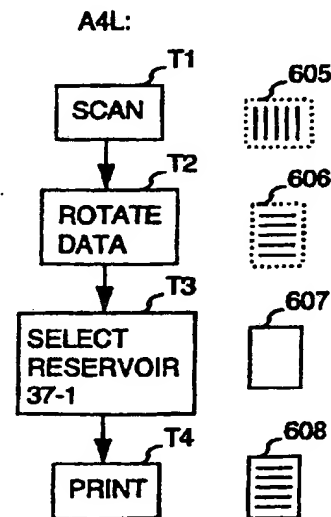


FIG. 6B

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Description

The invention relates to a digital image reproduction apparatus comprising a positioning section for the positioning thereon of a document for copying, in a first or second positioning orientation, said orientations being rotated through a substantially right angle with respect to one another;

a scanner unit for scanning a document positioned on the positioning section and for generating digital image data in so doing;

a processing unit for processing image data generated by the scanner unit, provided with a rotation module for rotating the image data through an angle;

a printing unit for printing a digital image on an image support, the printing unit being provided with at least one reservoir for image supports;

an operating unit provided with an operating panel having setting means for setting a required format and a required orientation of the required copies; and

a control unit connected to the said units for controlling the scanning of a document, processing of the image data thus generated, and printing the processed image data.

In an apparatus of this kind, a digital image data file is first made by the scanner from a document for copying and these image data are used to control the printing unit. By processing the image data in the meantime it is possible to change them and thus offer functionality which was not possible in optical copying machines, which are frequently referred to as "analogue" machines.

Such processing is, for example, rotation through an angle of 90°, so that, for example, a document placed transversely on the positioning section (generally a glass platen) can be printed on an image support (usually a sheet of paper) oriented in the lengthwise direction, i.e. rotated through 90°. The present invention makes use of this.

An apparatus as described in the preamble is known from US Patent No. 5 239 388.

In this known apparatus, use is made of the above rotation functionality by arranging for the scanner to determine the orientation of the original in a pre-scan, compare it with the orientation of the copy paper in the reservoir, and in the event of non-agreement, rotate the image data automatically through 90°, so that they nevertheless fit the copy paper. As a result, copying can also be carried out even if there is no copy paper present having the orientation of the original.

However, such automation sometimes leads to unwanted situations, because the user might have specifically wanted to copy on copy paper of a different orientation. In that case, the automatic behaviour of the

machine will surprise the user and even make his intentions impossible. Because of his experience with analogue copying machines, a user will generally expect the orientation of the produced copy to be the same as that of the original document and on that basis he will choose a specific orientation when applying the document to the positioning section.

The object of this invention is to provide a reproduction apparatus which can be operated in a simple manner both comprehensible and predictable to the user, wherein by means of digital functionality it is possible to make copies of original documents in more or other orientations than might be expected on the basis of the stocks of copy supports present in the printing unit.

To this end, according to the invention, the operating unit is adapted to offer for a copy format a choice of all the orientations corresponding to the said positioning orientations, including at least one orientation for which there is no stock of image supports available in the printing unit, and the control unit, in the event of the said unavailable orientation being set, selects a reservoir in the printing unit for delivering image supports, which reservoir contains image supports of the required format and another than the required orientation, and also causes rotation of the image data by the rotation module through an angle corresponding to the difference between the required and the said other orientation.

In this way, a choice of two orientations is always offered, one which refers to an actual stock of copy paper present in the apparatus and one which refers to a stock which in actual fact is non-existent, hence a virtual stock. In the case of the latter orientation, the image data are rotated and printed on the copy paper that is available. The operator does not know this, nor does he need to. He can choose whatever he wishes and is not surprised by unexpected (and possibly unwanted) automation.

In specific cases, as a result of technical limitations it may happen that a specific format of original documents can only be applied to the positioning section in a single orientation, while sometimes also a specific format of copy paper can only be processed by the printer unit in a single orientation. When the orientations of the document and the copy do not correspond, the control unit will automatically cause the image data to be rotated so that they can nevertheless be printed. However, the only orientation offered on the operating means is the one corresponding to that of the original document.

In a specific embodiment, the apparatus is provided with an automatic document feeder which positions documents on the positioning section in the same orientation as that in which they are offered to the document feeder. In that case, the orientation in which the documents are offered is therefore also applicable as the reference orientation for the user.

The invention will now be explained with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which like parts have

like references. In the drawings:

- Fig. 1 is a general layout of the reproduction apparatus according to the invention.
 Fig. 2 shows a scanner device with a document feeder.
 Fig. 3 is a diagrammatic view of the processing device for digital image data.
 Fig. 4 is a printing device.
 Fig. 5 is an illustration of an operating panel.
 Figs. 6A and 6B are each a flow diagram of a control program according to the invention.
 Fig. 7 is also an illustration of an operating panel.

Fig. 1 shows the general layout of an image reproduction apparatus according to the invention. This apparatus comprises a scanner 1 for opto-electrical scanning of a document and yielding digital image information corresponding thereto, an input unit 2 for image information from an external source, and a printing unit 3 for printing digital image information on a support material.

Both the scanner 1 and the input unit 2 are connected to a device 15 for processing and intermediate storage of image information, which is in turn connected to the printing unit 3. The scanner 1, input unit 2, device 15 and printing unit 3 are connected to a central control unit 18, which is also connected to an operating unit 19 provided with an operating panel 19A with operating elements and a display screen for use by an operator.

The scanner device 1 is shown in greater detail in Fig. 2. It is provided with a tubular lamp 5 and a reflector 6 co-operating therewith, by means of which a narrow strip of a document 8 placed on a glass platen 7 is illuminated. The scanner also comprises an array 10 of imaging glass fibres (a "selfoc lens array"), by means of which the light reflected by the document is projected on to a sensor array, e.g. a CCD array 12. The lamp 5, reflector 6, selfoc lens array 10 and CCD array 12 are combined on a carriage 11 which during scanning is advanced by a servomotor 9 at a uniform speed in the direction of the arrow 13, so that the document 8 is scanned line-by-line by the CCD array 12. The position of the carriage 11 is continuously measured by means known per se and used inter alia for the feedback circuit of the servomotor 9.

In this way each image dot of the document is converted to an analogue signal corresponding to the grey value of that image dot. The analogue signal is then converted by an A/D converter 14 to a digital signal for each image dot.

The scanner 1 is equipped with an automatic document feeder (ADF) 1A. This comprises a feed tray 301 for the insertion of a stack of documents 302 for copy-

ing, a separating mechanism 313, 314 for removing the documents from the bottom of the stack one by one, and a transport mechanism, consisting of the transport paths 303, 304, 305, 306 and the transport roller pairs 309, 310, 311, 312 for transporting a separated document to the platen 7. The document 8 is transported over the platen 7 by a conveyor belt 307, which transports it to the delivery tray 308 after scanning by the scanner carriage 11.

Fig. 3 is a diagram showing the construction of a device 15 for processing and intermediate storage of image information, in which the rectangles represent functional modules (both physical components and software modules) and the arrows indicate the data flow from one module to the next. The scanner 1, input unit 2 and printing unit 3 are included in this drawing in order to show their position relative to the device 15. Although not shown in the drawing, the various elements of the device 15 are connected to the control unit 18, which co-ordinates their action.

The digital signals from the scanner 1 are fed to a ZOOM module 103 which, if required, carries out enlargement or reduction via interpolation.

The signals from the ZOOM module 103 are fed via a buffer 104 to a half-tone module 105, which converts the signals, which then still describe grey values, into binary signals which specify one of two values: zero or one for each pixel, so that these signals are suitable for controlling a printing unit which can print only black or white image dots. The literature describes many half-tone processes, so that no explanation is required. It is immaterial to this description what half-tone process is applied provided that the resulting signals are binary.

The signals from the half-tone module 105 are in turn transmitted to a multiplexer 106. An input unit 2 for digital image signals from a local network 16 is connected to another input of multiplexer 108, so that digital signals from an external source, such as a work station, can be inputted. The input unit comprises a PDL interpreter which converts the received - coded - digital image signals into binary signals suitable for controlling the printing unit.

The multiplexer 108 transmits one of two data streams (from the scanner or the network) to a mixer module 108. The latter has a second input to which a return line 120 is connected to return signals from the memory 111, and this will be explained hereinafter.

In the mixer module 108 the signals from multiplexer 108 and return line 120 can be mixed in accordance with logic functions on a pixel basis corresponding to the mixing of two images. Examples of such logic functions are: OR, AND, EXOR. Mixing binary image signals in this way is known generally from the literature and requires no further explanation here.

The mixer module 108 is connected to a rotation module 109, in which the image defined by the signals from the mixer module 108 can be rotated through an angle of 0, 90, 180 or 270 degrees.

The signals from rotation module 109 are then compressed in a compression module 110 and stored in a memory 111. Although compression is not strictly necessary, it is advisable, because it is possible in this way to store the data of more documents. The compression method can, for example, be run length coding. The memory 111 is provided with a management system (not shown), which updates the addresses at which the data of the documents are stored.

The memory 111 is constructed with two independent read-out lines, so that the image data of two documents can be read out simultaneously. These read-out lines are each connected to a decompression module (112a, 112b). These are connected to processing circuits which are identical in principle and are formed by insert modules 113a, 113b. These modules can combine the image signals with artificial image data corresponding to a blank (white) image and which are delivered by a virtual frame module 114a, 114b also connected to insert module 113a, 113b. The purpose of this is to be able to make image data which describe a larger image than the image data from the memory 111, e.g. an image of which the right-hand half consists of a scanned document and the left-hand half is blank (white).

The insert modules 113a, 113b are connected to a mixer multiplexer 115, in which one of the image signals can be selectively passed or both image signals can be mixed in the same way as described for mixer module 108.

Mixer multiplexer 115 has two outputs. One is the return line 120 already referred to, which enables images stored in the memory to be rotated and also mixed with freshly supplied (scanned) images. The other output is connected via a buffer 116 to the printing unit 3, which will be discussed in greater detail hereinafter.

Buffers can be provided at various places in the circuit described. However, since they are not relevant to the principle of operation, they have been omitted from the description.

For the description of the printing device 3 reference will be made to Fig. 4. This printing device is provided with an endless photoconductive belt 20, which is advanced in the direction of arrow 24 at a uniform speed by means of driving and guide rollers 21, 22 and 23 respectively.

By means of the processed image data supplied by device 15, an LED array 25 is so controlled that the photoconductive belt 20, after being electrostatically charged by a corona device 30, is exposed line-by-line image-wise.

The latent charge image forming on the belt 20 by the exposure is developed with toner powder by means of a magnetic brush device 30 to form a toner image which in a first transfer zone is then brought into contact under pressure with an endless intermediate medium belt 32 made from or covered with an elastic and heat-

resistant material, such as silicone rubber for example. In these conditions, the toner image is transferred by adhesion forces from the belt 20 to the belt 32. After this image transfer, any remaining toner powder residues are removed from the photoconductive belt 20 by means of a cleaning device 33, after which said belt 20 is ready for fresh use.

The intermediate medium belt 32 is trained over drive and guide rollers 34, 35, the intermediate medium belt 32 being heated to a temperature above the softening temperature of the toner powder, e.g. by means of an infrared radiator disposed inside roller 35. While the belt 32 with the toner image thereon is advanced, the toner image becomes sticky as a result of the heating.

In a second transfer zone between the belt 32 and a pressure roller 36, the sticky toner image is transferred by pressure and simultaneously fixed on a copy sheet which is supplied from one of the reservoirs 37-1, 37-2 or 37-3.

The copy obtained in this way can finally be deposited in a delivery tray 39 or be fed to an inverting device 41 by a deflector element 40 (placed in the broken-line position shown). The copy sheet is turned over in this inverting device 41 and is then again fed to the second transfer zone between the belt 32 and the pressure roller 36 for printing with a powder image on the other side in said transfer zone, and is then deposited in the delivery tray 39.

Fig. 4 shows three copy sheet reservoirs 37-1, 37-2 and 37-3, the first two being arranged for copy sheets of the A4 size and the last for copy sheets of the A3 size. Reservoir 37-1 is the standard reservoir, from which copy sheets are supplied unless another reservoir is selected by an operator. Reservoir 37-2 is arranged for copy sheets of the same format as 37-1, and is intended for a different kind of copy sheet, e.g. a different colour or a different gram weight.

Of course, the number of reservoirs may also differ from three, and reservoirs can be used for different formats or orientations of copy sheets.

The different parts of the printing device 3 are controlled by the central control unit 18 directly or through the agency of sub-control modules. The operating panel belonging to the operating unit 19 is shown in Fig. 5 and comprises a display screen 60, such as an LCD display, and a number of keys, namely a start key 61, number keys 62, correction key 63 and selection keys 64A-E, 65A-D and the key cluster 66. All these elements are connected to the operating unit 19, which in response to operation of the keys passes signals to the control unit 18 and which also controls the display screen 60 for the purpose of showing selection options and messages to the operator.

When the apparatus is switched on, the display screen displays a picture formed by a number of vertical columns each situated above one of the selection keys 64A-E. Each column relates to a specific basic function of the apparatus and displays the various pos-

sible settings of that basic function. For example, the column on the extreme left is allocated to the choice between the copying function in which a document is scanned by the scanner and then reproduced, and the printer function, in which a print is made in accordance with digital image data supplied via the network connection. The currently selected setting, in this case the copying function, is displayed by a marker, such as a dark dot, or by highlighting. An operator can choose a different setting, e.g. in accordance with a cyclic program, by pressing a selection key.

The columns above the keys 64A (already mentioned), 64B (simplex or duplex, both in respect of the original document and the copy sheet), 64C (stapling) and 64D (the choice of the size of the printing paper) relate to the processing of the order. The column above key 64E relates to enlargement. This can be set automatically (by reference to the ratio between the original document and the selected copy format) or manually, by means of the key cluster 66.

The selection keys 65A-D offer the possibility of calling up a different set of functions (group) which cannot be displayed because of the restricted dimensions of the display screen 60. Generally, these functions are those which are not required for a simple copying or printing order, but which offer the operator more options for obtaining special printing results. In this example, these functions comprise shifting the margin on the print, adding covers, and multiple up. The meaning of the keys 65A-D is displayed in an associated field on the display screen 60, directly beneath each key. When one of the keys is pressed, the corresponding set of functions is rendered operative and the layout of the display screen 60 is adapted to the relevant functions. At the same time, this selection is displayed by framing or otherwise emphasising the field on the display screen 60 belonging to the actuated key of the group 65A-D.

The operating panel 19 also contains a number display 70, for displaying the number of prints set, as is generally customary on copying machines.

The column above key 64D on the operating panel contains a list of the selectable formats and orientations of copy paper. In this example, from bottom to top this is: a first A4 lengthwise and A4 transverse (this relates for example to normal white paper), a second A4 lengthwise and A4 transverse (this relates for example to coloured thicker paper for covers) and A3 lengthwise. The terms "lengthwise" and "transverse" are defined in relation to the direction of transport in the apparatus (this is the left to right direction to an operator at the machine). More specifically, "transverse" means that the long side of the document is situated transversely in relation to the direction of transport, and "lengthwise" means that the long side is parallel to the direction of transport.

Copy paper in accordance with the selection "A4 lengthwise" is, however, not actually present in the apparatus, as will be apparent from the description of the printing device, Fig. 4. The reservoirs 37-1, 37-2 and

37-3, in fact, contain respectively A4 transverse, A4 transverse and A3 lengthwise.

If an operator now selects "A4 lengthwise", the control unit 18 nevertheless internally selects the reservoir 37-1, or 37-2, and switches the rotation unit 109 (Fig. 2) into the mode in which the image data are turned through 90° in the clockwise or counter-clockwise direction depending on the technical layout of the apparatus. The copies are then made correctly, but are delivered only in the transverse orientation. This is not inconvenient to the operator, because the selection "A4 lengthwise" is only relevant in relation to the orientation of the original document and this relation is maintained.

The control program operative in the control unit 18 is shown in Figs. 6A and 6B.

Fig. 6A shows the procedure when the selection "A4 transverse" is selected on the operating panel (for the A4 choice at the bottom of the column on the display screen). In this case the program runs in accordance with the steps S1: scan the original (a "transversely" situated digital image 601 is generated); S2: select copy sheet reservoir 37-1 (a "transversely" situated copy sheet 602 is selected); S3: print the image data on a copy sheet from reservoir 37-1 (a "transversely" situated copy 603 is printed).

Fig. 6B shows the procedure when the selection "A4 lengthwise" is made on the operating panel and the program takes place in accordance with the steps T1: scan the original (a "lengthwise" situated digital image 605 is generated); T2: rotate the image data (the digital image 605 is rotated into a "transverse" digital image 606); T3: select copy sheet reservoir 37-1 (a "transversely" situated copy sheet 607 is selected); T4: print the image data on a copy sheet from reservoir 37-1 (a "transversely" situated copy 608 is printed).

An identical program applies to the top A4 choice in the column on the display screen, but of course the reference to reservoir 37-1 is replaced by reference to reservoir 37-2, in which other copy sheets of format A4 are situated, e.g. thicker coloured paper for covers. The addition of covers can be set for a copy order with the aid of the operating means. These covers are then taken from reservoir 37-2 and printed with the scanned images of corresponding original documents. Of course these covers should receive the same treatment in respect of rotation as normal copy sheets. Copy sheets from reservoir 37-2 can also be used as copy sheets for a complete copy order which has to be printed, for example, on sheets of another colour. In such a case, of course, it is desirable to offer the same functionality for these copy sheets as for the normal copy sheets in tray 37-1.

In another embodiment, the reservoir 37-3 is filled with copy paper of the A5 size. As an example it will now be assumed that because of technical limitations the automatic document feeder 1A can feed an A5 document only "transversely", while the printing device 3 can only pass an A5 document "lengthwise". Thus the orien-

tation is obligatorily "transverse" for the document feeder 1A. In the case of an A5 original and copy size, the control unit 18 automatically switches the rotation unit 109 into the mode in which the image data 90 are turned through 90°.

Fig. 7 shows the operating panel belonging to this embodiment. The column above key 64D now shows in addition to the two A4 choices in two orientations an A5 transverse option, although in actual fact A5 lengthwise is the only available copy orientation. However, this presentation is more comprehensible to the user, because it corresponds to the (obligatory) orientation of the original document. If the option for the copy orientation "A5 lengthwise" offered were to correspond to the paper stock in reservoir 37-3, the user would be confused because he would think that he must still set an image rotation. This is now done automatically by the control unit 18. The associated control program is exactly the same as that shown in Fig. 6B, although now reservoir 37-3 is selected.

The invention has been explained with reference to the above-described embodiments but it will be clear to the skilled man that other embodiments are possible for the invention as described in the claims.

Claims

1. A digital image reproduction apparatus comprising

a positioning section for the positioning thereon of a document for copying, in a first or second positioning orientation, said orientations being rotated through a substantially right angle with respect to one another;

a scanner unit for scanning a document positioned on the positioning section and for generating digital image data in so doing;

a processing unit for processing image data generated by the scanner unit, provided with a rotation module for rotating the image data through an angle;

a printing unit for printing a digital image on an image support, the printing unit being provided with at least one reservoir for image supports;

an operating unit provided with an operating panel having setting means for setting a required format and a required orientation of copies to be produced; and

a control unit connected to the said units for controlling the scanning of a document, processing of the image data generated in so doing, and printing the processed image data, characterised in that

the operating unit is adapted to offer for a copy format a choice of all the orientations corresponding to the said positioning orientations, including at least one orientation

for which there is no stock of image supports available in the printing unit,

and in that the control unit, in the event of the said unavailable orientation being set, selects a reservoir in the printing unit for delivering image supports, which reservoir contains image supports of the required format and another than the required orientation, and also causes rotation of the image data by the rotation module through an angle corresponding to the difference between the required and the said other orientation.

2. An apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the positioning section is provided with an automatic document feeder which positions documents on the positioning section in a positioning orientation corresponding to the orientation in which they are supplied to the document feeder.

3. A digital image reproduction apparatus comprising

a positioning section for the positioning thereon of a document for copying;

a scanner unit for scanning a document positioned on the positioning section and for generating digital image data in so doing;

a processing unit for processing image data generated by the scanner unit, provided with a rotation module for rotating the image data through an angle;

a printing unit for printing a digital image on an image support, the printing unit being provided with at least one reservoir for image supports;

an operating unit provided with an operating panel having setting means for setting a required format and a required orientation of the required copies; and

a control unit connected to the said units for controlling the scanning of a document, processing of the image data generated in so doing, and printing the processed image data, characterised in that

the operating unit is adapted to offer, for a copy format, a choice of a first and a second orientation which are rotated through a substantially right angle with respect to one another, including one orientation for which there is no stock of image supports available in the printing unit, and in that the operating unit

- when the said first orientation of the specific image support format is selected with the aid of the setting means, selects a specific reservoir for

- delivering image supports, and
 - if the said second orientation of the same specific image support format is selected with the aid of the setting means, selects the same specific res-
 5 ervoir and also causes rotation of the digital image data intended for printing on an image support of the required format in the second orientation, by the rotation module, through an angle
 10 corresponding to the difference between the first and second orientation.
4. An apparatus according to claim 3, wherein the
 15 positioning section is provided with an automatic document feeder which positions documents on the positioning section in the same orientation as that in which they are offered to the document feeder.
5. A digital image reproduction apparatus comprising
 20 a positioning section for positioning thereon a document for copying in a first orientation obligatory for a specific first format;
 25 a scanner unit for scanning a document positioned on the positioning section and generating digital image data in so doing;
 a processing unit for processing image data generated by the scanner unit, said processing
 30 unit being provided with a rotation module for rotating the image data through an angle;
 a printing unit for printing a digital image on an image support, which printing unit is provided
 35 with only one reservoir for image supports of a specific second format, which reservoir contains image supports in a second orientation rotated through a substantially right angle with respect to the said first orientation;
 40 an operating unit provided with an operating panel having setting means for setting a required format and a required orientation of copy sheets to be used for producing copies, only the said first orientation being offered for
 45 the said second format if a document for copying is of the said first format; and
 a control unit connected to the said units for controlling the scanning of a document, processing the image data generated in so
 50 doing, and printing the processed image data, which control unit, in the event of the format being set which corresponds to the said second format, selects the only reservoir in the printing unit with that format for delivering
 55 image supports, and also causes rotation of the image data by the rotation module through an angle corresponding to the difference between the said first and second orientation.
6. An apparatus according to claim 5, wherein the positioning section is provided with an automatic document feeder which positions documents on the positioning section in the same orientation as that in which they are offered to the document feeder.

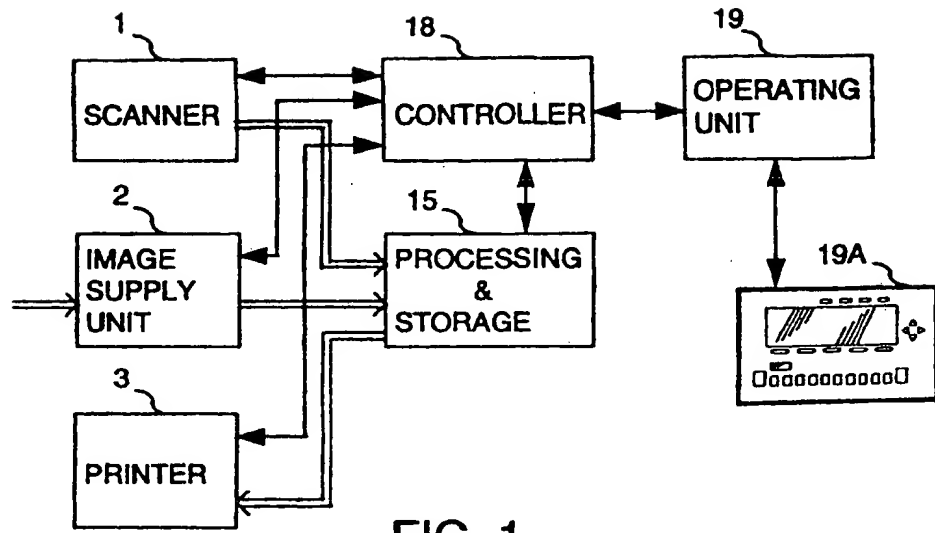


FIG. 1

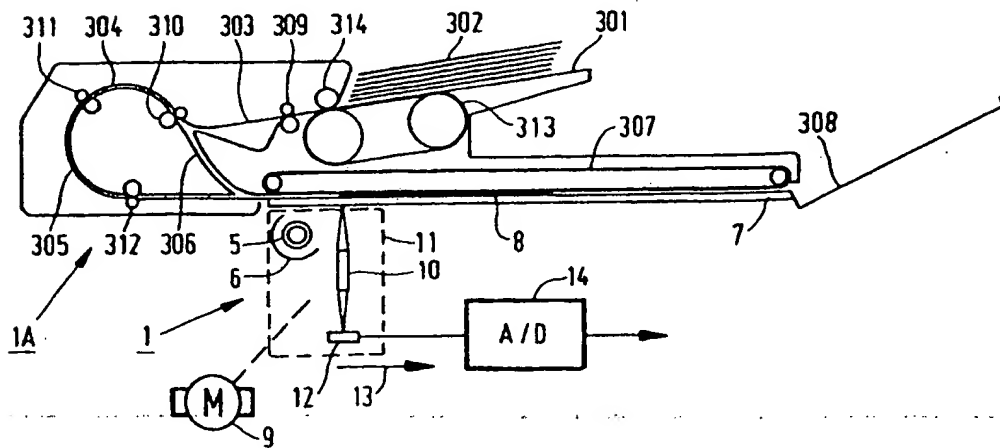


FIG. 2

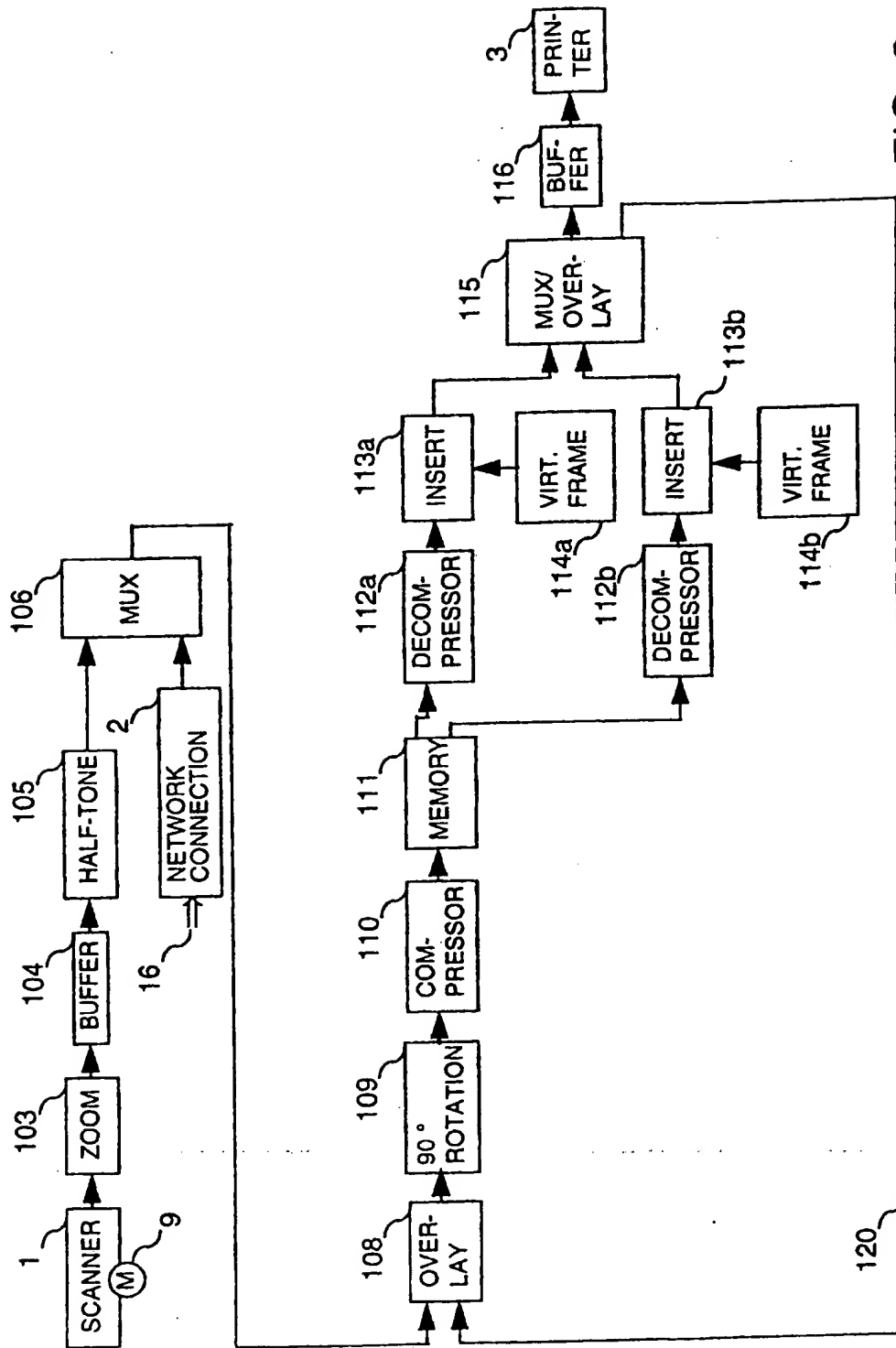


FIG. 3

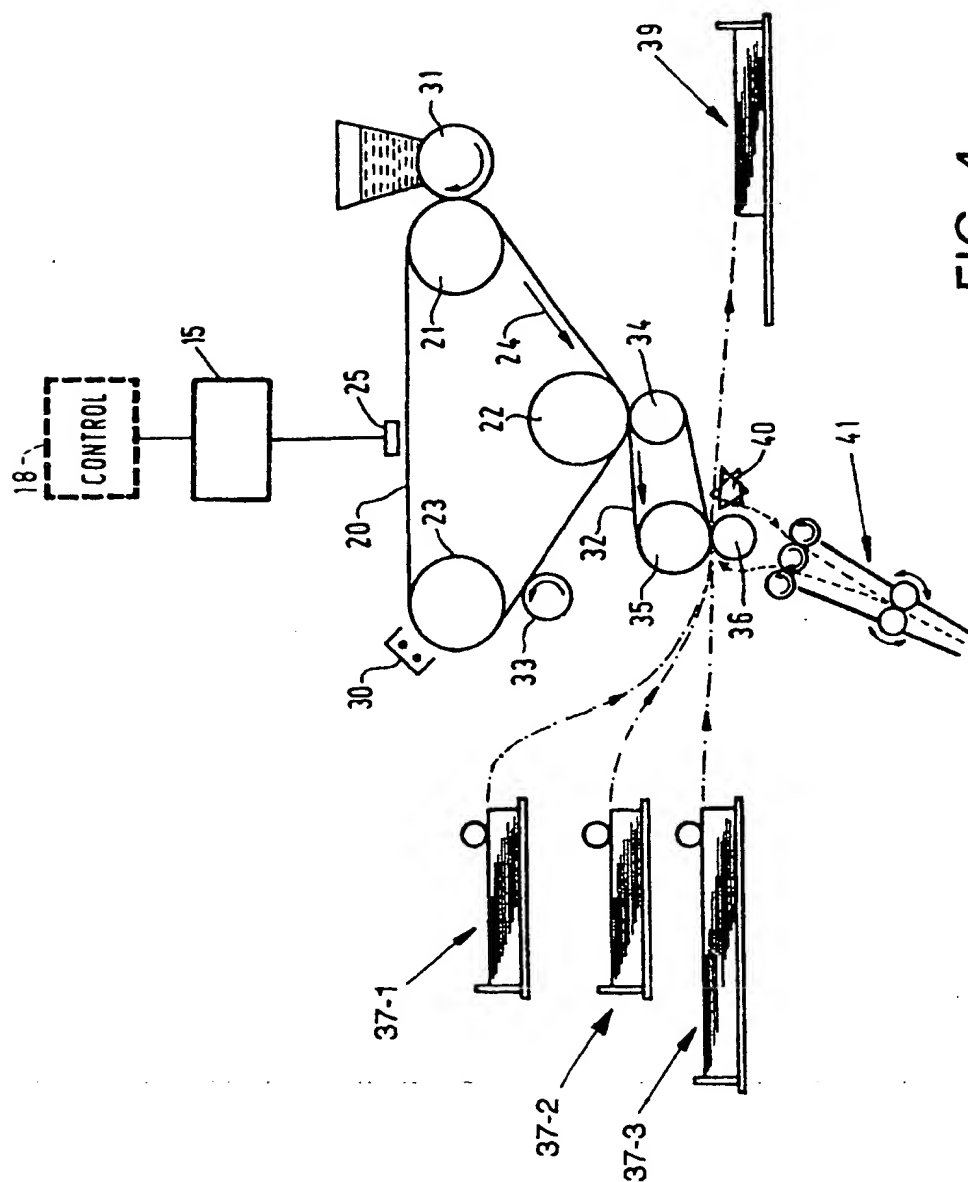


FIG. 4

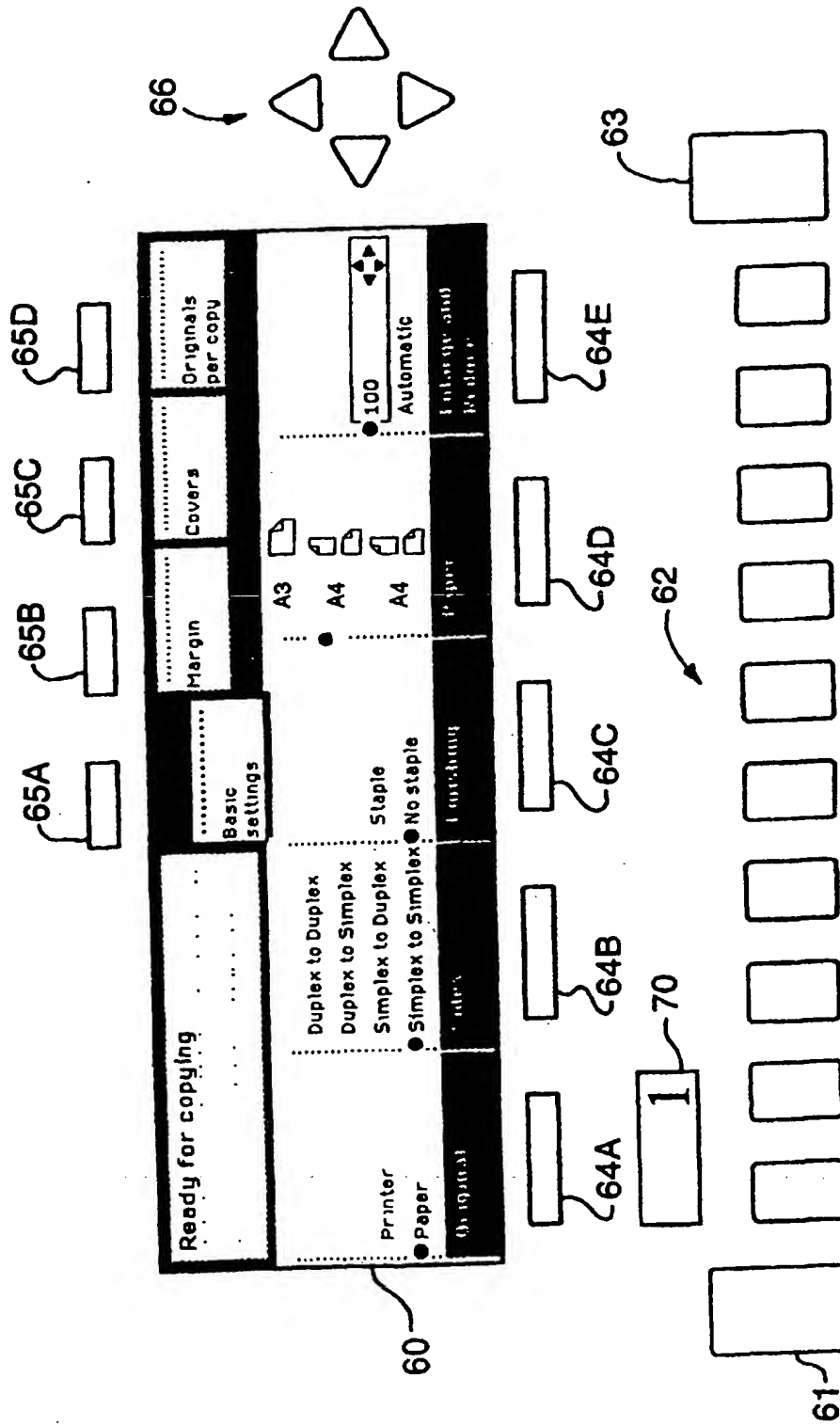


FIG. 5

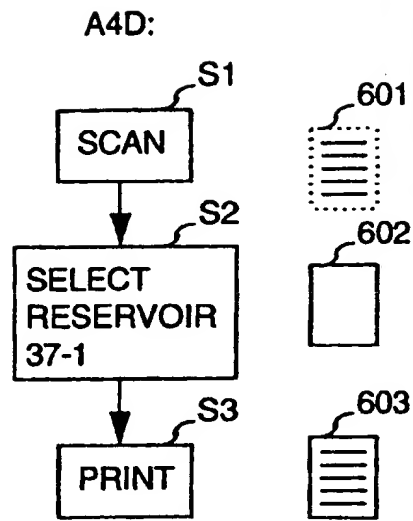


FIG. 6A

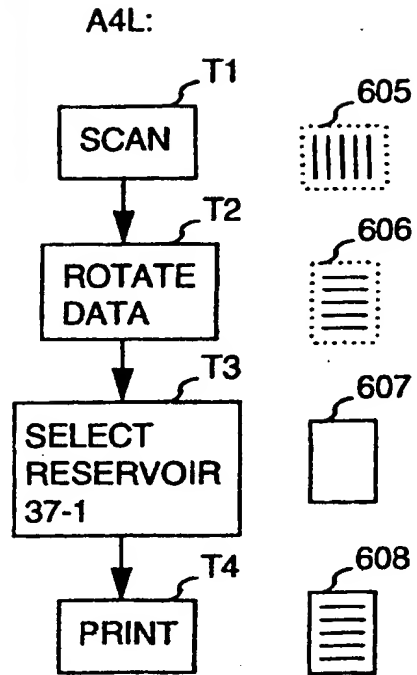


FIG. 6B

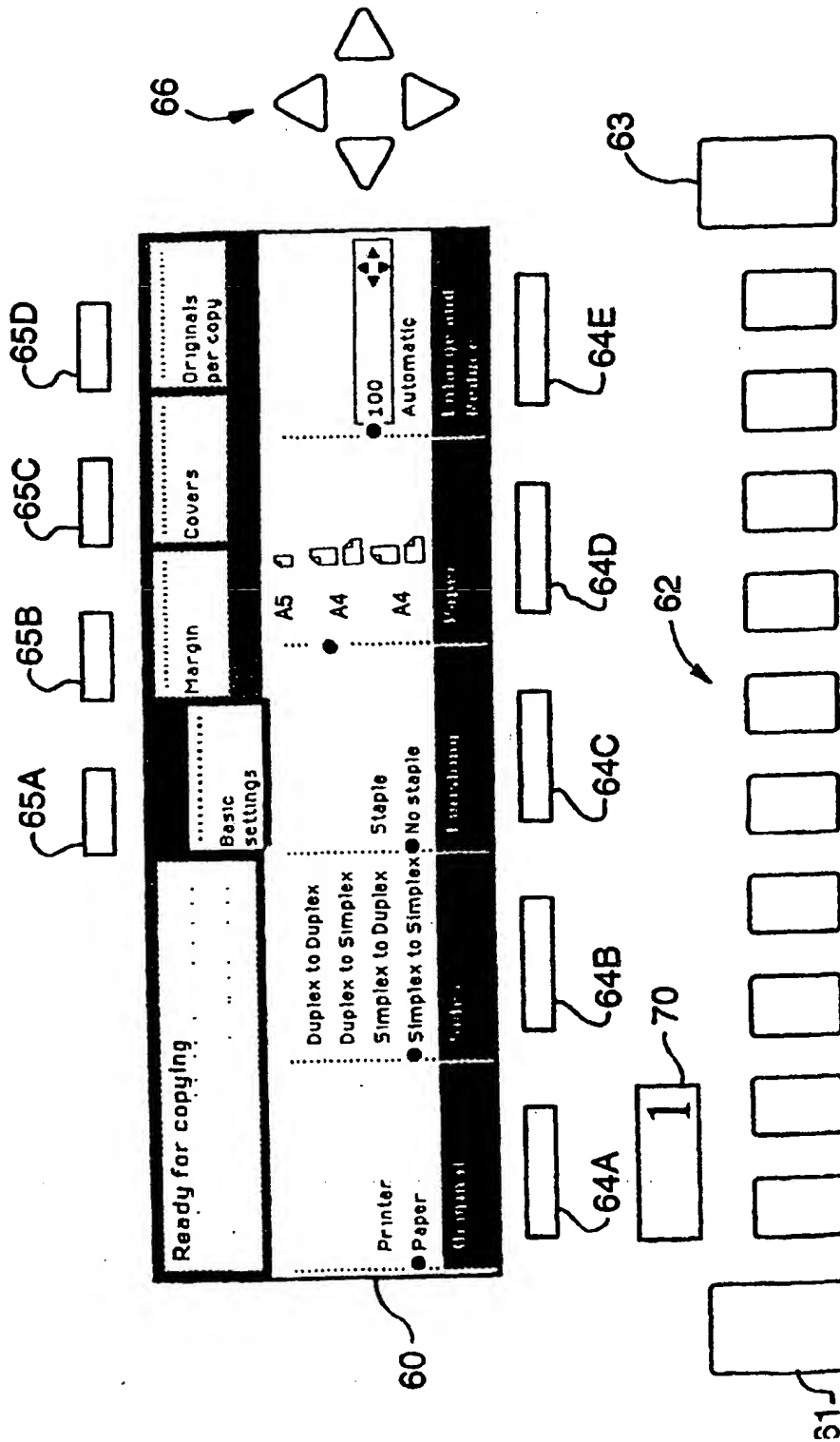


FIG. 7



European Patent
Office

EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 98 20 1798

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.8)
D, Y A	US 5 239 388 A (FUMINARI MATSUMOTO) 24 August 1993 * column 4, line 20 - line 36 * * column 11, line 65 - column 15, line 37 * *	1-4 5, 6	H04N1/387
Y A	US 5 301 036 A (M. W. BARRETT ET AL.) 5 April 1994 * column 7, line 40 - column 10, line 26 * ---	1-4 5, 6	
A	US 5 600 429 A (SATORU KITSUWADA) 4 February 1997 -----		
			TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.8)
			H04N
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search THE HAGUE		Date of completion of the search 14 September 1998	Examiner De Roeck, A
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